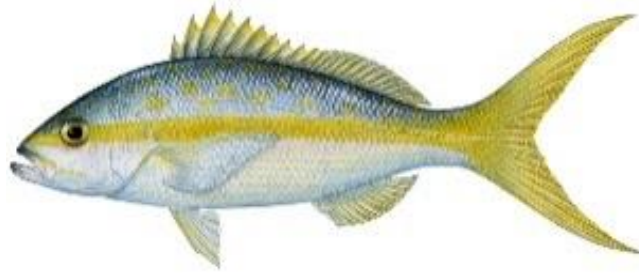


Extension of the Gulf of Mexico Sector Separation Sunset Provision

Frequently Asked Questions

October 2016



What is being proposed in this rule?

- Remove a requirement to use circle hooks when fishing with natural bait for the commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper south of Cape Sable, Florida, in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf). This would allow J-hooks to be used.
- Adjust the commercial and recreational fishing year in the Gulf for yellowtail snapper from January 1 through December 31, to August 1 through July 31 to coincide with regulations for this species in the South Atlantic.

Why should J-hooks be allowed for commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper?

- Yellowtail snapper are primarily caught around the southern half of Florida, with the majority of landings coming from the Florida Keys.
- Circle hooks are required when fishing with natural bait for reef fish, including yellowtail snapper, in federal waters of the Gulf. The use of circle hooks is intended to reduce discard mortality caused from fish being gut-hooked by J-hooks.
- For the commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper, fishermen attract the fish to the surface using chum and then use small hooks with natural bait and cane poles or spinning reels to catch yellowtail snapper. The use of J-hooks increases the efficiency of this method by decreasing handling times through quicker hook removal. Reduced handling times may also help reduce discard mortality rates.

Why is the fishing season being changed for both the recreational and commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper?

- Yellowtail snapper are primarily caught around the southern half of Florida, with the majority of landings coming from the Florida Keys.
- The rule would modify the yellowtail snapper fishing year in the Gulf, making it consistent with the new fishing year in the South Atlantic.

- The same fishing year would benefit the fishermen that harvest yellowtail snapper in both the Gulf and South Atlantic regions.

How can I comment on the rule/amendment?

- Comments on the framework action and the proposed rule to extend the sunset provision must be received no later than **November 16, 2016**.
- All comments specifically directed to the yellowtail snapper framework action and proposed rule will be addressed in the final rule.
- Note that if your comments on the framework action and the proposed rule are the same, you only need to submit one set of comments.
- You may submit comments on the yellowtail snapper framework action and the proposed rule, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2016-0058, by any of the following methods:
 - Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0058>, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
 - Mail: Submit written comments to Cynthia Meyer, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505.

Links to additional information on this action and rulemaking

- You may obtain electronic copies of the framework action and the proposed rule from the NOAA Fisheries Web site: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/reef_fish/2016/yellowtail_snapper_framework/index.html.
or the e-Rulemaking Portal: www.regulations.gov.